

HIGHER EDUCATION: ANSWERS TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What Has Been Happening to Community College Access?



Headcount Recently Declined. The California Community Colleges (CCC) Chancellor's office has stated that 175,000 students were "denied access" to community colleges in 2003-04.

- Actual headcount fell by about 90,000 (5 percent) from fall 2002 to fall 2003.
- The remainder of CCC's estimate reflects the amount of growth they assumed would have occurred in that year (an additional 5 percent).
- Measuring enrollment in terms of full-time equivalent students tells a different story, which we discuss on the next page.



Reasons for Decline in Headcount Vary. There are several reasons for the decline in enrollment.

- ***The Legislature Directed Cuts in "Inappropriate" Concurrent Enrollment.*** About 30,400 fewer high school students enrolled in the fall of 2003 largely as a result of legislative directive to reduce enrollment of such students in low-priority and inappropriate physical education and other classes.
- ***Fees Increased by \$7 Per Unit.*** The fall 2003 fee increase probably affected some students' decisions on the number of units. (This impact was primarily on non-needy students, as needy students are eligible for fee waivers.)
- ***Some Colleges Reduced Number of Course Sections.*** Some students may not have been able to find open classes during the times and days that they desired.



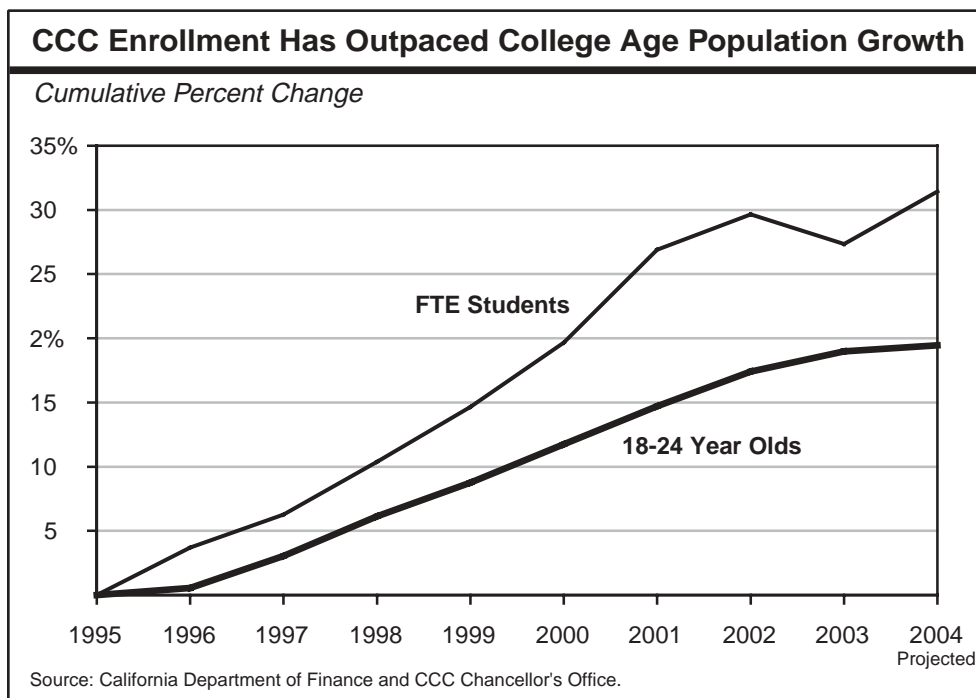
Colleges Do Not Deny Admission. As open-enrollment institutions, community colleges do not deny "admission" to college. Instead, students register for classes that have available space, usually on a first come, first served basis.

- While no one was directly "turned away" from CCC, certain factors noted above—fee increases and difficulty in getting certain classes—clearly deterred many students from participation.



Budgeted Enrollment Tells a Different Story. Student enrollment is frequently measured in terms of full-time equivalent (FTE) students. As opposed to headcount, the FTE measure reflects the total number of full-time course loads that are taken by students. Measured in this way, the decline in CCC enrollment was much more modest.

- According to the most recent available data, CCC enrollment declined by about 17,000 FTE students (or 1.7 percent) from 2002-03 to 2003-04. This suggests that the decline in headcount largely involved students who were taking relatively few courses. As a result, the current student population is taking, on average, more courses per student.
- The Governor's 2004-05 budget proposal would provide funding for an additional 35,000 FTE students.
- Even with the recent small decline in enrollment, CCC enrollment remains higher than would be higher than growth in the college-age population.



This is one of a series of issue briefs examining important questions about higher education funding in California. For more information on this topic, or to request other briefs from this series, contact the Legislative Analyst's Office Higher Education section at (916) 319-8339, or visit our website at www.lao.ca.gov.